

La Grande, OR  
(Union Co.)  
Observer  
(Cir. D. 7,485)

JAN 29 1999

*Allen's* P. C. B Est. 1888

### **SALEM: Lawmakers mull poor kids' health**

With advocates warning that a declining number of Oregon children have access to doctors or health insurance, legislative leaders say they may set aside a share of the national tobacco settlement to help.

Lawmakers aren't sure how much the settlement will bring in. But Senate President Brady Adams and House Speaker Lynn Snodgrass said Thursday they want interest from the funds, which they estimate will be between \$5 and \$10 million a biennium, to be used for health-related programs. 5038

"It's important for us to set some parameters about how the money should be spent," said Snodgrass. "But it's clearly an option to spend the money on insurance for kids."

And Children First for Oregon, a non-profit watchdog group, says more children than ever are in need of health care coverage.

The group released a study Thursday indicating that more than 78,000 children, or 9.5 percent of Oregonians younger than 18, were uninsured in 1998, up from 8.4 percent in 1996.

"When you have to choose between rent, food and health care — often times that's what gets cut," said Tonia Hunt, a public policy associate for Children First.

The study also found the state's poorest children were almost twice as likely to be uninsured as those in families whose incomes were above the federal poverty level.